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Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development

1996 Minister's Forum on Adult Learning

What we heard . . .

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What we heard . . .

A message from the Deputy Minister

Public consultation has become an important resource to the department in addressing the complex challenges facing the adult learning system. The Minister's Forum on Adult Learning affords a unique opportunity for learners, learning providers, business and community representatives to come together and share their views on key adult learning issues.

The theme for this year's Minister's Forum was *People and Prosperity: a human resource strategy for Alberta*. A discussion paper outlining a renewed human resource strategy for the province was presented and laid the groundwork for three additional discussion topics: opportunities for youth, adult development reform, and a renewed vision for apprenticeship and industry training. In addition, the department's three year business plan was discussed as well as future business plan priorities.

This report is a synopsis of what was said over the duration of the Forum. The input received through group discussions represents a sharing and debate of individual ideas. There was no attempt to build consensus or vote on suggestions or recommendations for action.

The ideas generated by participants were utilized to assist in the redraft of the *People and Prosperity: human resource strategy* document (published in early February) and further development in the areas of adult development reform and apprenticeship and industry training. Forum input was also considered in the finalization of the 1997-2000 Business Plan and in the planning for the 1998-2001 Business Plan.



Lynne Duncan
Deputy Minister

Topic 1 - Status of the 1996-99 Business Plan and Priorities for the Future. (this topic was discussed by 220 participants in 13 small groups)

Following a presentation by the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development, participants broke into small groups to discuss their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the current business plan. Participants identified some challenges and obstacles and recommended priorities for future business plans.

Assessment of the 1996 to 1999 Business Plan

(A) Strengths

Participants were generally supportive of the department's three year business plan. Some of the comments from participants were that the business plan was pro-active, comprehensive and ambitious with clearly identified targets, strategies and actions. The department was given high marks for its commitment to its vision as well as continuous review and renewal, accountability, consultation, student financial reforms and a stated shift towards a greater learner focus.

Vision

Participants generally felt that the vision was strong and that the values and goals were clearly articulated. The focus on a shared responsibility and a recognition that learning occurs in many places were cited as important.

A number of participants acknowledged the need to continually review the present post-secondary system to ensure its responsiveness to the economy. Participants applauded the efforts of the entire system to be innovative, forward thinking and not to rest on past achievements.

Accountability

Participants were pleased with the plan's emphasis on the need for cost effectiveness while at the same time promoting innovation. The principles underlying the setting of standards, key performance indicators and reinvestment through the envelope system were generally supported. Concern was expressed over how to ensure fairness in the application and administration of the various strategies.

Consultation Commitment

Participants were pleased with the commitment to continued consultation with partners in adult learning. Collaboration was mentioned as key to improving the system in the future.

Student Financial Reform

It was generally felt that the rationalization of student financial support and attention to student loan deficiencies were important goals, particularly in light of rising tuition fees.

Learner Focus

Finally, participants were pleased that the needs of learners were receiving greater attention and focus. Areas cited by participants as important included recognition of previous learning, encouraging alternate routes to learning, provision of adequate levels of student assistance, increasing the range of learning opportunities and recognition of the diverse nature of learner needs.

B) Areas for Improvement

While supportive of the department's overall commitment to areas such as accountability and student financial reform, participants were concerned with how the department would achieve results. Participants wanted more specifics. Business plan areas that received the most comments were system funding, student financial assistance, accountability, processes in implementation and supports for learners at risk.

System Funding

A number of participants felt that additional money should be allocated for the infrastructure renewal, learner enhancement and the research

envelopes to accomplish system goals. The renewal of infrastructure at post secondary institutions both in terms of physical plant and in updated equipment needed for labs was identified as the highest priority. Funding to support the development and purchase of new technologies was also felt to be important. Others felt that there was not enough reinvestment directed toward learners.

While it was acknowledged that the province had absorbed federal cuts to transfer payments in terms of institutional funding, some participants were concerned about the possible impact of future federal transfer cuts to the province.

Student Financial Assistance

Outside of infrastructure renewal, the greatest challenge identified by a majority of participants was in making learning affordable to Albertans. Many were concerned about the impact of increases in tuition fees on accessibility. Participants also raised concerns about increasing debt for students and its impact on the learning experience. Some participants expressed concerns with current funding restrictions on grant and loan applications and turn around times in processing applications for student financial assistance.

Apprentices said they were concerned with paying tuition while coping with downtime from work and having dependents to support.

Accountability

The area of accountability garnered the most comments from participants. Participants recommended that the department needed to provide timely and relevant data including information that would allow for international comparisons.

A number of participants requested more information on institutional key performance indicators (KPI's) and requested more details. Some had questions on the applicability of certain indicators while others raised concerns about the cost of collecting the data.

System Focus

Concerns were raised over the focus of the post-secondary system. Some participants felt that non-formal learning should receive more emphasis. The need was expressed for more flexibility in learning with a future emphasis on enhancing learning/teaching processes. Areas for which participants required more details included program rationalization, centres of specialization, competition versus collaboration and issues associated with the funding envelope system.

Participants also expressed a need for strategies aimed at individuals who have not accessed the post-secondary system. One of the challenges identified was to ensure that the learning needs of individuals with low levels of education and skill were adequately being met.

Business Plan Implementation

Some participants were concerned that they were not able to review and provide input to a draft of the 1997-2000 Business Plan. There was a wide range of comments regarding implementation of the 1996-99 Business Plan. Some felt that implementation was too slow while others felt that it was time for the system as a whole to take time to pause and reflect on the changes that have already taken place. Participants also expressed concern about the possible impacts of continued department downsizing.

Meeting Learner Needs

A challenge identified by many participants was to increase access and supports for learners with multiple barriers. It was generally felt that departmental and institutional communication with all learners could be improved and that specific strategies should be identified.

Participants also identified the need for the adult learning system to respond with greater speed and flexibility on issues such as transferability, updating curriculum and providing more part-time learning opportunities.

Participants requested more information as to business plan strategies addressing how forecasted increases in enrollments might be

accommodated, given the available resources for infrastructure renewal. Some participants suggested that the duration of learning programs could be reduced to increase access.

Participants also suggested additional strategies be included in the Business Plan to prepare learners for the workplace such as increasing opportunities for work placements, international exchanges and entrepreneurial skills training.

Additional suggestions

- **vision** – the roles of partners require clearer definition and the department needs to address the gap between the goals and the strategies designed to meet them.
- **affordability** – again clearer definitions are needed. The question raised was affordability for who and for what.
- **accessibility** – system realignment – creating seats where they are needed, strategies needed outside the publicly funded system, better forecasting data.
- **department linkages** – greater integration needed with Alberta Education and Family and Social Services.
- **improved collaboration** – institution to institution and government to government outside the province.
- **involvement of business** – a strategy is needed to involve business and labour in a greater way.
- **apprenticeship** – issues around mobility and access given existing scheduled time frames should be addressed.

Suggestions to be Considered for Future Business Plans

- Adequate financing for infrastructure upgrades.
- Develop linkages with Alberta Education (focus more resources in the K-12 system to reduce the numbers of learners having to repeat their basic education as adults).

- Reduce competition and encourage collaboration (move on the development of centres of excellence).
- Facilitate the development of partnerships between the private sector and post-secondary institutions in areas such as research, work placement opportunities and technological infrastructure.
- Open up apprenticeship to expand into additional occupational areas and take steps to see the financing become more industry driven (focus on just-in-time training).
- Increase learner support (reward students for performance, provide greater counselling services, address student debt load).
- Address the illiteracy problem more aggressively.
- Begin to address issues associated with the quality of education (alternative learning technologies, concerns of faculty, etc.).
- Focus on execution of the business plan and review whether successful completion of strategies will lead to accomplishment of goals (consider goal and strategy realignment).

Advice to the Minister

- Provide evidence that participant feedback has been acted upon by the department.
- Keep holding forums such as the Minister's Forum. Look at the possibility of sector specific forums.
- Exercise caution in terms of further deregulation. Provincial standards must be maintained.
- Recognize the role of private trainers.
- Put priorities to work within the envelope system.
- Don't retire.

Topic 2-People and Prosperity: a human resource strategy for Alberta (*this topic was attended by 220 participants in 13 small group sessions*)

The discussion paper *People and Prosperity: a human resource strategy for Alberta* was introduced by the Honorable Jack Ady, Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. Following the Minister's introduction, a panel discussion was held involving four individuals with expertise in the human resource area. The panelists were David Elton, Canada West Foundation, Graham Lowe, University of Alberta, Christine Couture, Youth Employment Services Centre and Bill Croft, Alberta Science and Research Authority. Their points of view provided participants with additional perspectives.

People and Prosperity is based on a vision of Albertans reaching their potential: self-reliant, able to participate in the workforce, and contributing to the economy and their communities to the full extent of their interests and abilities. The discussion paper proposed action in six major areas:

- **helping people with information and choices**
New actions including the use of computer technologies to share information, new career planning initiatives and single-window delivery of labour market services.
- **keeping knowledge and skills current**
New actions ensuring that apprenticeship and industry training is responsive to emerging needs, linking post-secondary funding to learning outcomes and measuring results against national standards of excellence.
- **providing opportunities for youth**
New actions including a learning transition for youth initiative and the establishment of a province-wide career education foundation

- **helping Albertans overcome barriers to employment**

New actions including reform of the province's adult development programming.

- **worker mobility**

New actions including the development of a skills passport to track workers' competencies.

- **workplace innovations**

New actions for sharing information on successful workplace practices and innovations.

Participants then broke into small groups to discuss the discussion document. Four areas were covered including an assessment of the document, priorities for action, roles of all stakeholders in the implementation of the strategy and advice to the Minister. Discussion in the small group sessions tended to focus more on the philosophy behind the goals rather than a critique of the proposed ways upon which each goal could be achieved.

Assessment of People and Prosperity (Draft Discussion Document)

A) Strengths

Generally participants felt that the document was a critical beginning and acknowledged the collaborative effort of the many provincial departments involved in bringing such a document together. People and Prosperity won high marks from a number of participants for its broad, comprehensive nature and its attempt to deal with the whole adult learning system. The vision, goals and positive focus were strongly supported. Many individuals identified with principles such as the acknowledgement of human resources as an asset and investment, recognition of the important role of partnerships and value of all forms of work and workers.

The actions proposed which received the most support included creation of one stop service centres, more opportunities for youth, recognition of people with barriers as having particular needs requiring special support, the

development of a skills passport, and providing up-to-date labour market trends information.

B) Challenges to be Addressed

Areas requiring clarification, details or improvement included vision and principles, access to information, access/responsiveness of programs and implementation.

1. Vision and Principles

Social Values

Some participants felt there was too strong an emphasis on education for economic development. There were strong and diverse opinions regarding a general education versus a job-oriented education. Many participants talked about the intrinsic value of a good education and felt that more needed to be done to promote the message of life long learning. There was some consensus among participants that improvements needed to be made in the area of teaching individuals how to learn and engage in critical thinking.

Some participants suggested that the document needed to recognize the inter-connectedness of social issues such as poverty, hunger, abuse, addictions, etc., and a person's ability or potential to learn. Some participants felt that the issue of child care needed to be addressed as it would impact the ability of certain individuals to go back to school.

Some suggested addressing the issue of the working poor through legislation to raise the minimum wage. Others were concerned about increasing student debt coupled with relatively low paying job opportunities upon graduation.

System Focus

Some participants recommended that the human resource strategy place a greater emphasis on individual learners. A new model of learning, it was said, is needed to replace the existing linear model where people book blocks of time for training and then look for or go back to work. Some also suggested a need to increase participation levels in the skilled trades areas.

2. Access to Information

Career Counselling and Information

Participants said that more dollars needed to be directed to training for career counsellors and that more counsellors were needed in the system. Again, the need for labour market information and counselling/career planning was perceived to be strongest in high schools.

It was also felt that more ongoing career transition assistance was required. In terms of labour market information, participants requested greater general forecasting information and better regional forecasting information.

Using Technology

Some participants were unclear as to the actions proposed to make information accessible to individuals through computer-based technologies. One concern stated was that 93% of Albertans did not have Internet access at home. The issue of whether rural areas have such access was also noted. Participants had differing views of the benefit of implementing new technologies. Some expressed concern regarding the assumption that technology would solve all problems of access. Others were concerned as to who would pay for it and who would take leadership.

3. Access/Responsiveness of Programs

Targets

Some participants felt that the strategy should have addressed needed supports for all adult learners and not be focussed primarily on youth. It was not clear to some as to how the needs of older workers, individuals with disabilities, illiterate workers, low income learners, native people and displaced workers would be specifically addressed by the human resource strategy. Participants also called for research on the factors influencing the decision of individuals not going on to post secondary education, and for the creation of mechanisms to reach the 10% of the population who are not self-reliant and who have multiple barriers.

International Focus/Skills Passports

Participants were concerned that the international perspective needed to be enhanced. Some suggested the need to develop strategies to:

- expose learners and instructors to international perspectives through funded practicums.
- attract international students.
- promote the internationalization of curriculum.
- provide additional language programs.

Participants liked the idea of skills passports but were concerned about their level of acceptance and recognition in the business community and in other provinces. The marketing of these passports to employers was felt to be crucial to the success of the initiative.

4. Implementation of the Human Resource Strategy

Action Plan/Setting Standards

As with the Business Plan, participants said that "how to's" needed to be more fully developed. Some participants felt that the goals were too broad; that the actions were not concrete enough and that costs need to be identified.

Participants stated strong support for the establishment of standards for learner achievement and the promotion of national standards of excellence. Best practices and benchmarking were supported as ways of gauging the achievements of both learners and learning providers.

Funding

Participants felt that certain funding needed to be realigned to meet goals. Participants suggested that adequate resources, both staff and financial, be provided to carry out the human resource strategy.

C) Role of Partners

Participants were asked how they saw the roles of various partners in the adult learning system. Generally there was consensus that roles needed to be clarified to implement the strategy. It was recommended that broad based participation was needed at the local level and that all partners needed to actively talk with and listen to the needs and issues of other stakeholders. Many participants talked about the importance of changing attitudes in bringing about system wide change.

Suggestions for Action

- Introduce the strategy as a 5 year plan and provide more specifics for each of the proposed actions.
- Identify learner groups at risk and set targets for them.
- Strategies should reflect a greater learner focus.
- Link the HR strategy with the economic development strategy. Focus on identifying the sectors that will see the highest levels of job growth.
- Work with similar minded provinces to create a national curriculum.
- Set targets to reduce the unemployment and the drop-out rate.
- Look at global benchmarks.
- Incorporate a mandatory career counselling model through the K-12 and post secondary education systems.
- Develop a best practices guide (what has worked well in other countries).
- Address the demographics of regions in greater detail.
- Identify ways to involve those not in the adult learning system.
- Encourage business and industry to commit to a greater investment in training.

Advice for the Minister

- Address how the human resource strategy is going to be implemented.
- Develop a broad communication strategy for the human resource plan.
- Encourage a shift from a "system" focus to a learner focus.
- Have a separate Forum targeted solely to learners in 1997.
- Address affordability for the learner.
- Continue the consultative process and encourage the collaboration and coordination that has been developing among stakeholders.
- Ensure adequate funding to:
 - develop information technologies.
 - provide regional demographics and profiles.
 - increase job opportunities (work experience, co-op placements).
- Facilitate more high school awareness of trades training
- Bring Family and Social Services and post secondary institutions together to collaborate on the drop-out problem.

Topic 3: Opportunities for Youth

(This topic was attended by 70 people in 4 small group sessions)

One of the goals identified in *People and Prosperity: a human resource strategy for Alberta* is to provide youth with a solid foundation in learning and skill development. A particular emphasis is placed on youth who do not complete high school and who do not go on to post-secondary education.

One initiative identified in *People and Prosperity*, is to develop a youth careers program that would:

- help prepare high school students to make a more effective transition to work.

- provide an alternative route for students to obtain qualifications which are competency-based and validated and/or developed by industry.
- allow students to gain work experience as part of their program.
- build linkages between schools, local business and post-secondary institutions.

Forum discussion focused on identifying issues related to youth and the labour market and suggesting ways to ease the school-work transition.

A) Issues Facing Youth

Participants stressed young peoples' need for career and labour market information that will assist them in identifying possible career and/or educational path(s). Knowing what is involved in training for a particular field will, according to forum participants, also help learners to set realistic career goals. Additionally, they felt that this will allow youth to become informed about the skills sought by employers.

Also noted as a barrier to entering the workforce was the lack of opportunities for youth to gain employment experience. Participants stated their belief that work experience allows young people to develop employability skills that assist in accessing the job market. Many forum participants mentioned that links between employers and educators would help facilitate this process.

A number of forum participants were concerned with rising individual costs of a post-secondary education. Others viewed post-secondary education as a worthwhile investment. Some of the specific effects of increasing educational costs mentioned were:

- those requiring student financial assistance are concerned about their ability to manage debt.
- learners are having to devote time that should be spent on studying to part-time jobs.

- some people are discouraged from pursuing post-secondary education because of the cost.

Several participants expressed concern about youth unemployment rates and that many young people are under-employed. Some participants felt that business was not doing enough to create worthwhile employment opportunities.

Participants debated whether parents and youth had realistic attitudes and expectations regarding career opportunities. The concern expressed was that the pursuit of university-based education was being over-emphasized as the only route to a successful career. Society, it was said needed to embrace and promote other viable routes into the labour market such apprenticeship, owning your own business, etc.

B) Recommended Actions

In general, participants did not comment on the specific strategies mentioned in *People and Prosperity*. They did, however, have alternative suggestions for how to ease school-to-school and school-to-work transitions. Repeatedly, participants made mention of the need for links between K-12, post-secondary and employers.

Participants stated that in order to enable smoother transition, young people should be provided with opportunities for work experience, co-op and training on-the-job programs. Participants also felt that youth could gain valuable experience through volunteer work.

The need for more career information and counselling was reiterated. This information, it was said, should be targeted to young people and their parents. Parents, it was said, need to encourage their children's interest in education and also be more informed about the labour market.

Some participants felt that business could take a larger role in training youth. In addition, some participants felt that business was not devoting enough resources to train current employees.

Suggestions/Advice to the Minister

- Recognize that different groups of people may require different services to address their barriers (e.g. dropouts, immigrants).
- Encourage greater linkages between K-12 system, the post-secondary system and employers.
- Address concerns regarding student debt.
- Employers and government need to provide more work experience opportunities for youth.
- Parents need to be informed about educational and/or career opportunities, so that they can promote these to youth.
- Enhance the provision of career information and/or counselling.
- Parents and the K-12 system should be encouraged to promote all post-secondary options for youth. University should not be promoted as the only option for youth.

Topic 4 Employability and Beyond: The Adult Development Reform Initiative *(this topic was attended by 79 people in 5 small group sessions)*

The Adult Development Reform Initiative (ADRI) is a collaborative effort to establish a framework for the delivery of learning programs and services for Albertans who need to improve their basic skills (e.g. literacy, English language skills, basic education, academic upgrading, personal management skills, job preparation and job search skills). The objectives of these programs and services are to help learners prepare for employment and/or help learners prepare to enter post-secondary programs or further training.

Some of the key elements of the proposed reforms are:

- an emphasis towards integrating essential academics with appropriate skills training and employment preparation.
- academic upgrading programs that provide the essential academic requirements needed for entry into post secondary programs, further training or employment.
- recognition of prior learning through the use of some form of credential and/or portfolio.
- articulated program options that will meet learner needs and avoid overlap and duplication.

Participants in the small group sessions were asked to comment on the reforms through responses to questions related to needed changes in adult development programming. One area of emphasis was if employers and post-secondary institutions would accept an alternative credential to a Grade 12 diploma if such a credential could be shown to clearly meet the skills and knowledge required.

A) Changes Required in Adult Development Programming

While most participants agreed with the proposed shift to a more client-centered adult development system, some felt that program interventions were too heavily focused on employability as an outcome. It was felt that the reform initiative should concentrate on helping people with their barriers to learning. The concern was expressed that short-term interventions focused on employability would not serve the best long-term goals of either the client or the department.

A number of participants had questions related to how adult development programming fits within the overall post-secondary system (i.e. how many learners are being served, where are they being served, what is it costing, etc.). Participants pointed out that it was somewhat unclear as to what the adult development system included (e.g. retraining).

Participants also commented that they did not know how well the needs of the learner were being met through current adult development programming. As a result, participants suggested that it was difficult to comment on whether changes to existing programming should be made and what changes these should be. Participants supported the inclusion of work experience as part of the recommended reforms and a suggestion was also made to include mentoring as a component.

The issue of loan versus grant was also raised in a couple of the small group sessions. Some felt the need to “level the playing field” and that guidelines surrounding loan versus grant eligibility be revisited.

B) Collaboration with Education, Business, and Labour Partners

It was suggested that learners should also be involved in any collaborative effort.

Many participants also felt it was important to have learners, teachers, business and labour engage in collaboration at the community level where existing strengths could be built upon and local needs addressed. Community planning, it was said, is critical to long term solutions.

It was suggested that the areas for potential collaboration be kept narrowly focused. Areas and topics identified for possible collaboration included: forecasting, more effective targeting in terms of individuals being placed in the proper programs, addressing the needs of older workers, and literacy.

Specific suggestions included the creation of an employer/employee funded learning plan, encouraging business to provide incentives to foster partnering, and to use taxation as a way to encourage employers to hire students and train employees.

Some participants suggested that the department needed to work towards a funding allocation strategy that would reduce the level of competition among institutions.

C) Acceptance of Alternate Credentials

There was no consensus in response to this question of whether employers and post-secondary institutions would accept an alternate credential to a Grade 12 diploma if such a credential could meet their skill and knowledge requirements. Some participants were of the mind that Grade 12 courses were generally accepted prerequisites and that emphasis should be placed on improving them. Others advocated the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and suggested that it was an accepted standard across North America. Still others disagreed and said that we should be “using a different measuring stick for adults”.

A number of participants noted that employers were becoming more critical of traditional benchmarks such as a high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and were having to turn to independent testing of reading and math skills to ensure that minimum skill requirements were being met. It was becoming more difficult, participants said, to judge skill levels based on existing credentials.

Many participants supported the notion of a competency-based credential and felt that such a credential would be value added. Participants questioned how it would be determined whether the student had attained competency. They also wondered whether it was realistic from an administrative perspective and whether it could be done in a cost effective manner given the thousands of students enrolled each year.

Participants generally agreed that in order to gain acceptance of any adjustments to the existing credential, attitudes would have to change. Parents and post-secondary institutions were singled out as the key groups that would have to be brought on-side.

Participants did say that work being done in the area of prior learning assessments and developing a skills profile or skills portfolio was a good start but that there was a lot still to do.

Suggested Changes to Adult Development Programs

- Advanced Education and Alberta Education should agree on a new single credential which includes an assessment of competencies.
- Ensure flexibility in the delivery of adult development programs. Make sure that the needs of rural Albertans are being met.
- Take more care in assessing the need and capability of the learner.
- Acknowledge the social/economic impact on the learner and the need to address basic needs for child care, counselling support, etc. Programming should address learner needs holistically.
- Change the criteria for success depending on the client (e.g. a single parent versus someone with no dependents).
- Continue to provide some support to the individual after they acquire a job.
- Provide more supports that will assist individuals to engage in their own career planning. Introduce learners to self employment as a career path option.
- Move away from having one department (Family and Social Services) providing funding with another department (Advanced Education and Career Development) doing the delivering. The thinking and planning needs to be more integrated.
- Include those individuals in career transitions requiring some retraining as falling under adult development.

Advice to the Minister

- Do not stall or stop this ADRI process – ensure its preservation under a new Minister.
- The process addresses present circumstances, but not the impact of the Employment Insurance legislation and the huge numbers of people needing career transition training.
- Investigate creating a funding envelope accessible to private trainers.
- The discussion has been geared to post-secondary institutions but community agencies should have more input into the consultation process.
- Business and industry involvement could be stronger. Use focus groups.

Topic 5: Apprenticeship and Industry Training - A Vision for the Future *(this topic was attended by 69 participants in 4 small group sessions)*

The apprenticeship and industry training system is a key part of Alberta's larger system of adult learning. Current forecasts of private sector investment indicate that Alberta is about to enter a period of relatively strong economic growth and industrial development. The apprenticeship and industry training system will be under some pressure to resource this growing demand.

Rapid changes in technology and the increased tendency toward specialization are creating a challenge for Alberta's adult learning system to find ways of keeping industry-oriented skills training current in an information based, globally competitive economy. Part of this challenge is to ensure that such learning is readily accessible to employed Albertans, as workers now have to balance work obligations with frequent retraining needs.

Other challenges and opportunities identified for apprenticeship and industry training include:

- the demand for mobile and flexible workers.
- changing federal and provincial funding with little growth expected in public resources to support expanded training programs.
- the provincial government’s expectation of continuous improvement and productivity gains in program delivery.
- the business community’s expectation for less government regulation.
- the taxpayers’ expectation of greater accountability and efficiency from government.

A discussion paper, *A Vision for the Future: Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training* has been developed by the department in collaboration with the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board to address the challenges facing the province’s apprenticeship and industry training system.

In this session participants were asked to assess the goals and strategies proposed in *A Vision for the Future*, as well as identify priorities for change.

A) Assessment of Goals and Strategies

Participants focused their discussion on various facets of the fourteen strategies proposed in the discussion document. For example, the advisory network (Local and Provincial Apprenticeship Committees) and issues associated with financial support for apprentices (e.g. tuition fees) received considerable attention by all small groups. There was less discussion on the vision, principles and goals outlined in the discussion paper.

Strategy #1: Redesign the advisory committee network.

Participants believed that industry should drive the apprenticeship and industry training system, and that government should set the standards. Clarification of the proposed role for the Provincial Apprenticeship Committees (PACs)

was requested. Participants stated that the PACs are the most functional component of the current advisory committee system. Participants felt that communication with apprentices is vital. Some suggested that a role might be found for them on the Local Apprenticeship Committees, (LACs) as long as the apprentices were excluded from the exam component of the committee. Participants recognized that the network is extensive – 700 to 800 people - and raised the question “but are we really getting value?”

Strategy #2: Extend recognition of apprenticeship training toward other post-secondary programs.

Participants believed that extending recognition of apprenticeship training toward other post-secondary programs was a positive strategy. Some endorsed the notion that pre-employment, pre-trades training, and high school vocational education courses should receive better recognition toward apprenticeship programs. It was suggested that apprenticeship set a standard education level for entrance to apprenticeship, probably a high school education. Additionally, they recommended improving the recognition of prior learning by negotiating national training standards for apprentices.

Strategy #3: Consider opportunities for flexible certification.

Participants cited worker mobility as a very important concept in Alberta’s apprenticeship and industry training system. Participants said they wanted worldwide mobility, and believed that Alberta had to make the same potential for mobility possible for workers who come here.

Participants identified that some employers can hire workers with less training for some jobs, but for a wider range of jobs, either multi-skilled workers or a greater variety of workers were needed. Some participants believed that flexible certification is a good idea, as long as training remains viable, workers’ mobility is retained and/or enhanced, and as long as workers are not pigeon-holed into limited roles. Other participants equated flexible certification with fragmentation of the trades. They believed that

flexible certification would create different levels of trades.

Participants liked the option of dual or triple certification, where an apprentice can be registered in more than one apprenticeship program at one time.

Strategy #4: Increase flexibility in methods of formal instruction.

Participants agreed with the need to promote flexibility, but also stated the need for instruction to be innovative and appropriate. Participants added a number of qualifiers to these remarks however, including the following:

- innovations may be appropriate for some trades, but not for others.
- distance delivery may not be more effective than standard delivery.
- self-study may increase drop out rates.
- instructors and students don't necessarily have the skills to train/be trained by internet.
- modular training may mean that some apprentices only complete the training that would be most lucrative for their company, therefore not receiving the broad-based training the system is designed to provide.
- be particularly watchful about the appropriateness of changes to training.

Participants suggested that government:

- allow for more private trainers, ensuring that they meet standards.
- provide training (or at least part of the training) through a PAC certified employer. Some of the introductory material, it was suggested, might be covered on the worksite.

A key principle to observe, participants said, was to not compromise the quality of the instruction. Some participants advocated flexible, competency based, just in time training, appropriately timed to minimize the impact on the apprentice and the employer (e.g. evening

classes, day release, correspondence, accelerated learning, block release, etc.).

Strategy #5: Promote apprenticeship and industry training in new occupations.

Participants agreed that apprenticeship and industry training should be promoted, particularly in schools. They stated that the trades will never be obsolete, and that the use of advancing and future technologies in the trades was well worth promoting.

Strategy #6: Review the regulatory framework.

Participants stated that there were many regulations in place that were not being enforced, and must be reviewed. There was a concern that government should leave certain issues, such as salaries, to the private sector.

Strategy #7: Clarify the criteria for designation of compulsory certification trades.

Participants stated that if training were compulsory, more apprentices would be likely to receive it. It was suggested that public safety should be a major factor in determining what is or is not a trade. Some participants said that the optional certification trades create an un-level playing field, since there is no incentive for all employers to train in the trade.

Strategy #8: Communicate the alternative ways of accessing apprenticeship training.

Participants suggested that the administration agencies and associations who provide training could become a vehicle for providing information as to the alternative access routes to apprenticeship.

Strategy #9: Expand opportunities for youth in apprenticeship and industry training.

Participants stated that access to apprenticeship and industry training should be equal for all people and for any age.

Strategy #10: Review the administrative framework for apprenticeship and industry training.

Participants stated their support for examining the existing administrative framework with a view to exploring more efficient ways and methods. It was also suggested that industry and training institutions have an increased role in such a review.

Strategy #11: Provide apprentices with appropriate financial supports.

Participants suggested that if federal funding is to be removed or diminished, then the department should lobby for tax deductions/incentives for hiring apprentices.

Participants also recommended that the system should be improved so that financial supports are available before training commences or at least early on during the training.

Participants differed on their response to proposed tuition fees. Some saw tuition fees as a reflection of an investment made in an apprentice's own future, even an incentive to completing a training program. Others saw tuition fees as a barrier to apprentices beginning an apprenticeship, or completing their certification. Participants agreed that tuition fees should be affordable, and should be assessed like tuition fees are assessed for any other post-secondary training program. There were concerns that tuition fees would not be affordable, particularly for first year apprentices, and the suggestion was made that tuition fees should be scaled to the expected journeyman income for the trade.

Strategy #12: Encourage greater industry participation in renewing technology for in-school training.

Participants supported increased industry participation and contributions in renewing technology and in providing financial support. They suggested that alliances with training centres were also a good idea. Participants also recommended that apprenticeship and industry training increase the recognition and/or publicity that industry receives for their contribution. Generally, participants thought

that the strategies did not provide incentives for industry involvement in the form of partnering to train apprentices.

Strategy #13: Avoid duplication in providing formal instruction.

Some participants didn't feel that duplication in providing formal instruction was necessarily a problem. Some felt, for example, that there was a need for competition. Participants were of one mind in one aspect which was, "don't compromise the quality of the training".

Strategy #14: Clarify roles for apprenticeship and industry training participants.

No comments were offered by participants.

Ideas for Consideration

- Have students/apprentices on the local and provincial advisory committees.
- Provide a way to maintain the apprentice's income while training, through night school, one day/week, part-time options or other flexible programming.
- Build flexibility into training methods. Focus on what needs to be taught according to the curriculum, as opposed to how or where it is to be taught. Focus on competency-based; not time-based training.
- Build flexibility into training delivery. Use private providers, innovative programming, more flexible scheduling, more flexible training locations.
- Continue to train to existing standards.
- Improve the mobility of apprentices, develop national training standards for apprentices.
- Monitor and/or enforce training more effectively.
- Provide a registry to link employers to potential employees.
- Improve the Local and Provincial Apprenticeship Committee system.

Advice For the Minister

- Listen to the what participants have said and be responsive.
- Promote apprenticeship and industry training as a career choice.
- Help the apprentice, and ensure that apprenticeship training is affordable.
- Keep it simple.
- Consider changing the advisory committee structure.
- Enhance cooperation between industry and trades.
- Enhance the recognition of apprenticeship training to other forms of training.
- Support entrepreneurship in the trades.
- Provide tax breaks for apprentices.
- Provide accessible training locations.
- Ensure true representation of the trades.
- Make all trades compulsory trades.
- Provide a registry to link apprentices and employers.

What the Minister's Forum is all About

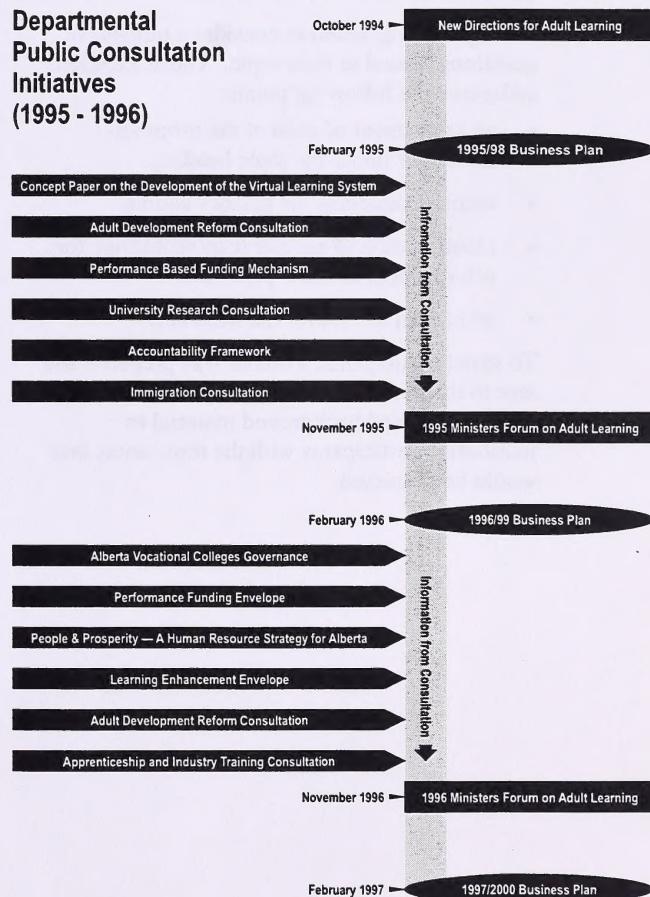
This is the second in a series of yearly reports designed to keep you up-to-date about Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development's ongoing public consultation processes, particularly the Minister's Forum on Adult Learning. These consultation processes, which began in 1992 under the title "*Adult Learning: Access Through Innovation*", led to the development in 1994 of the document "*New Directions for Adult Learning in Alberta*", a policy framework and action plan for the renewal of the adult learning system in Alberta.

One of the strategic directions outlined in "New Directions" was that a Minister's Forum on Adult Learning be held to allow the Minister to report on the progress being made on the goals

of accountability, accessibility, responsiveness and affordability and to gain feedback from stakeholders on these results and other issues of concern.

As the chart below demonstrates, consultation is very much a key component of the business planning process. A number of major consultations have taken place or are currently underway, the results of which will contribute to the development of the 1997-2000 business plan.

Departmental Public Consultation Initiatives (1995 - 1996)



This year's Minister's Forum on Adult Learning, held November 21-22, 1996 in Edmonton and was attended by 220 participants. Participants included learners, representatives of post-secondary education providers, business, industry, and community groups.

Approximately one third of the participants were learners.

To encourage a wide range of views, a balance of participation from representative groups was arranged for each group session. The discussion was facilitated and recorded through arrangements made by the department. In addition, department resource people were included in each group to respond to any questions or needs for clarification.

Each group was asked to consider a number of questions related to their topic. These questions addressed the following points:

- an assessment of each of the proposed initiatives under the topic heading.
- recommendations for priority actions.
- identification of partner responsibilities for achievement of these priorities.
- additional advice for the Minister.

To assist participants, a binder was prepared and sent to them in advance of the Forum. Each binder contained background material to familiarize participants with the topic areas that would be discussed.

Where Do We Go From Here

In addition to this "What We Heard" document, the department will be providing you feedback on other consultation activities which are still ongoing. Key dates to watch in 1997:

- March 1997 - Release of Apprenticeship and Industry Training "Keeping You Informed" document to Albertans.
- Summer 1997 - Release of Employability and Beyond, a policy framework for the Adult Development Reform Initiative.

With the results of the Minister's Forum on Adult Learning and other consultations, the department will continue to provide you with information on the progress being made in the area of adult learning. It is important that we continue to communicate.

If you wish to provide information to the department or get on a departmental mailing list, please let us know either electronically, by phone, fax or in person.

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